



GLOBAL CHALLENGES:
ACHIEVING SUSTAINABILITY

Global Challenges: Achieving Sustainability

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ABSTRACTS

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Bridging knowledge systems for sustainability – the case of the indigenous territory and biosphere reserve Pilón Lajas, Bolivia. By Helen Gambon

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There is growing consensus that ecosystems management and human well-being are too complex issues to be tackled by a single scientific discipline. Inter- and transdisciplinarity as well as including traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) in research settings are thus on the rise among scholars dealing with sustainability on the local to the global scale. Recognizing different values, practices, norms or institutions organizing and shaping human –earth system interaction as legitimate is the first step in bridging knowledge systems. But sustainability research has to go beyond the recognition of epistemological differences and take a closer look on questions regarding the underlying assumptions of knowledge – of what exists, of what can be known. This does not only apply to so-called traditional forms of knowledge, but also to natural sciences and the humanities. This paper's aim is to bring out the different ontologies underlying the management of the Indigenous Territory and Biosphere Reserve Pilón Lajas in the Bolivian Amazon region. The researcher argues that remaining challenges concerning the (unsustainable) use of natural resources in the area is mainly based on diverging perceptions on the human-earth relationship. While park authorities and NGO's represent a science-based worldview characterized by the dichotomy society-nature, the interaction of the Mosetene and Tsimane indigenous groups with their natural environment cannot be understood without the spiritual component that is shaping both the actions of individuals and communities, and the way nature presents itself to human beings. Different ontologies thus result in diverging ways of what is perceived by different actors as a "problem", of the underlying causes, and what possible solutions to it exist. The focus is put on an analysis of the concept of sustainability in the empirical case of the Indigenous Territory and Biosphere Reserve Pilón Lajas.